



المعهد المصري للدراسات  
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

INSTITUTE  
ARTICLES

26 MARCH  
2018

# Egypt Election: A Reading in Likely Participation

Khaled Fouad



[WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG](http://WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG)

Eipss.EG Eis\_EG

TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64  
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: [info@eis-eg.org](mailto:info@eis-eg.org)



## Egypt Election: A Reading in Likely Participation

Khaled Fouad

The grave violations that the Egyptian regime committed during the period that preceded registration of candidates for the presidential election on January 20, 2018, and after that, until kicking off election campaigning on February 24 – represented a rich material for the international press to address the miserable election scene almost on a daily basis. Although the features of the election scene clearly indicate the reality of political life in Egypt in the aftermath of the coup d'état on July 3, 2013, but the Egyptian citizen's handling of elections still carries signs and signals that cannot be overlooked, and represents a richer material that could help understand the complicated and interrelated Egyptian situation. Perhaps the appropriate questions in that period revolve around:

- Whether the elections in its current form could motivate citizens to participate and cast their votes,
- The extent of interaction of the Egyptian citizen with such elections,
- What the size of potential participation of individuals, blocks, and of different community sectors could be, and
- Whether the reality of political life in Egypt has destroyed any vision of political change through the course of elections.

In order to provide answers to these questions, we will find a variety of different ideas based on interpretations of the current Egyptian scene without being based on a real measure of the attitudes and opinions of Egyptian citizens.

This led us to seek answers to these questions from a different perspective, far from the space of ideas and theorizing and closer to the real world and trends of the Egyptian public opinion. This will probably reflect an image that could be closer to the

aspirations, hopes, concerns, and priorities of citizens at the moment, and their perception and evaluation of the political reality. However, this may be difficult amid a ban on all forms of scientific, systematic and objective opinion surveys, imposed by the ruling regime.

We will attempt here to analyze the results of a field study on the likely participation in the presidential elections 2018, which was prepared by the Egyptian Center for Media Studies and Public Opinion - "Takamol Masr" during the period from March 13 to 18, 2018. It is known that the opinion surveys conducted by Takamol Masr over the past years have gained substantial credibility, and the results of his polls showed a good degree of approach to reality, objectivity and independence.

The 2018-survey on the potential participation and reasons for abstention (poll allowing more than one answer) compared to the 2014- survey indicates several signs, including:

There is a clear drop in the number of potential participants in the 2018 elections compared to the numbers predicted by the study conducted by the center before the 2014 elections. The survey showed that 2.6% of Egyptians participate in the 2018 elections, while the rate of potential participation in the 2014 elections was 10%, taking into consideration that the potential participation rates usually decline in the actual voting. It is noteworthy that potential participation rates in 2014 elections declined from 10% to 6% of the Egyptians. The real percentage that participated in the 2014 vote was monitored by neutral estimates contrary to what was declared by the regime, which means that the potential participation rate in 2018 may decline to less than 2.6%.

## Reasons behind Abstention

As for the main reasons behind abstention from participating in the 2018 elections, more than one factor scored very high percentages, which means that this phenomenon is complicated. 96% of abstainers said that their decision to abstain from participation in elections was mainly because they “felt that their vote was not important”, 93% because the “results of elections were already settled”, and 87% said that it was due to their “non-interest in elections”. These high percentages of abstention from participation in elections, in spite of the huge election campaigning during the past days, reflect a great deal of the Egyptian citizen's assessment of elections and the political scene in general. On the one hand, the election scene does not seem convincing to many, especially due to the practices of the regime, including arrests, threats and restrictions on anyone who announced his intention to run for elections. This gave an impression that there is no real election and that participation in such process would be worthless, especially that the election results are almost known to everyone. On the other hand, the closure of the public sphere and all paths of peaceful change, along with a strong security grip, brutality and abuses, pushed citizens to refrain from active participation in the political scene. In fact, this reflected directly on large sectors of Egyptians that no longer care about elections, the whole political scene, or any change that could come through a peaceful democratic path. 67% of the abstainers from participation in the 2018 presidential election stated that the illegality of elections was one of the reasons behind their abstention from participation, against a percentage of 58% in the 2014 election. This indicates a rise in the percentage of those who do not participate because they believe that elections are illegitimate. This result carries indications that may go beyond non-recognition of the legitimacy of elections under a regime that came after a coup against the results

of democratic elections. The high percentage of abstention is also due to the repressive practices against citizens, including arrests, torture, enforced disappearance, execution and assassination; which led to the erosion of the legitimacy of the regime, if it ever had any.

In response to a question presented by the survey about the main reasons behind participation in the 2018 elections in comparison with the 2014 elections (allowing choice of more than one alternative), there were several important signals:

- The “search for stability” represented the main motivation for participation in elections in both events, where 96% of the participants in the 2018 elections stated that the “search for stability” was one of the most important reasons behind participation in the elections, against 93% in the 2014 elections for the same reason. The most important indication in this poll is that the primary and biggest motive for some sectors within the Egyptian society was fear of deterioration of the security situation and the effect of any likely change on stability (regardless of its nature) rather than the performance of the ruling regime. Therefore, the security situation is still a motivation for some citizens to stick to the regime, especially that the situation in Sinai is still very volatile. In fact, those who resorted to ballot boxes wanted to choose a military commander regardless of his real ability to manage the security files, not to mention other vital files that directly affect their life. Also, Al-Sisi has been well aware of this since he came to power. He has always been promoting himself as the savior who can provide security to people and protect the country from collapse and terrorism even at the expense of economic conditions. This gave some Egyptians an impression that the absence of Sisi from the scene would necessarily mean absence of security, and collapse of the state and its institutions, especially that Sisi used to draw comparisons between the security situation in Egypt and that in other countries such as Syria and Iraq.

In fact, there is a remarkable decline in Sisi's popularity, as 36% of the potential participants in the 2018 elections said “their support to Sisi” was one of the main reasons behind participation in elections, against 83% in the 2014 elections. The difference here is not insignificant and directly reflects the decline in Sisi's popularity from 2014 to the time of the presidential election in 2018. The economic dimension is the most important factor that may explain the decline in Sisi's popularity, as the economic crises seriously affected large sectors of society over the past years and led to a high level of discontent among them. The economic policies pursued by the regime led to the aggravation of the economic situation, the high unemployment rates, the price hikes, and the high cost of living – that resulted in the spread of poverty in society. 41% of the participants in the 2014 elections said their participation was mainly due to the “unwillingness to let Muslim Brotherhood return to power”. However, this factor only accounted for a negligible proportion of the reasons for potential participation in the 2018 elections. This shows that the fear that the Brotherhood may return to power is no longer a great motivation for participation in 2018 elections as it was in the 2014 elections. This can possibly be due to the Brotherhood’s poor effectiveness in the political scene in recent years as a result of the severe crackdown on the group, as well as its internal crises. On the other hand, the regime was able to terminate political life and weaken all parties and political forces that were active after the January revolution, through a severe security grip that besieged any political action. This accordingly gave a (fake) image of the regime’s stability to some Egyptians.

In response to a question presented by the survey about the political affiliation of potential participants in the 2018 elections, and comparing this to the 2014 elections, there is another clear indication of the decline of Al-Sisi’s popularity. The Christian bloc likely to participate in the 2018 elections accounts for 41% of the total blocs and political trends against 48% in the 2014 elections. Given this low turnout expected in

2018 compared to 2014, this reflects a significant decrease in the number of Christians who intend to participate in elections, which indicates the erosion of Sisi's popularity even among his solid block that has always been in his favor.

## Conclusion

Through a careful reading of the figures mentioned in this article, it will be easy to note that the economic, security and social conditions are the most concerns of the Egyptian citizen. Also, it is remarkable that the Egyptian citizen has lost interest in the political situation or assessment of the regime's policies in light of the strong security grip that has dominated all details of the Egyptian scene. This appears clearly through the Egyptians' likely reluctance to participate in the 2018 elections. The regime may see that the elections and its apparent results are steps to secure its stability. However, the same scene poses threats to the regime's stability as well as the stability of the whole nation, especially amid the growing discontent among citizens towards the restriction of political freedoms, collapse of living conditions, lack of public security, as well as the state of tension that the military and security services experienced in the period prior to elections.